



# Minnesota Spirit



## SHOWCASING THE SPIRIT OF AGENCY PARTNERSHIP AND VETERAN SUCCESS STORIES

### NATIVE AMERICAN VETERAN RETURNS TO HIS ROOTS

*By RJ Roundtree and Terry Lang*

Doug Shore crossed the state line into Minnesota in the summer of 2000 and, after pitching a tent, looked around and said, "I am home!" A search to locate his family tree just three years ago led to the discovery that he is a Dakota Indian. Since that time, Doug has pursued the goal of learning the Dakota Language for obtaining employment as a language teacher or facilitator.



Doug Shore strikes a pose for a Photo-op while at the University of Minnesota East Bank Campus

Terry Lang, Minnesota WorkForce Center DVOP, and I recently visited Doug and Neil McKay, Dakota Language and Culture Instructor, to discuss the rehabilitation progress and future employment goals. Neil noted that the Department of American Indian Studies Program at the

University of Minnesota was the first program of its kind and recently celebrated its 30 year anniversary.

Doug retired from the U.S. Navy as a E-9 Master Chief and has not been able to physically obtain suitable employment based on his prior training, work experience, and military skills. He completed initial vocational testing and counseling in Texas which led to the occupational goal of Dakota Language instructor. His rehabilitation services were transferred to Minnesota for his enrollment at the University of Minnesota.

During our conversation at the American Indian Studies Office, Doug revealed how some of his ancestry was traced to historical incidents in Minnesota (1862 and 1865) where relatives were executed for participating in uprisings against authorities. One of his relatives was identified as an interpreter for Little Crow.

According to Doug, his contact with newly found relatives has resulted in their encouragement of his efforts to learn the Dakota Language. He has made initial contacts for future jobs an information indicates a strong interest and demand for a person with

language skills training. This was validated by the statements from his Language and Culture Instructor, Neil McKay.

The VR&E staff congratulates Doug on his occupational choice and his goal to preserve and revitalize the Dakota Language. His search for his family led to his Minnesota ancestry and heritage. His return to Minnesota will provide opportunities to renew contacts with his family and suitable employment as a Dakota Language Teacher, Facilitator, or Program Specialist.



Doug Shore, Robert Roundtree, and Neil McKay, Instructor in Native American Languages

#### **Special points of interest:**

- Scott Stamper, U.S. Air Force veteran, is completing the 16 month DAV National Service Officer Training Program.
- Kevin Knight, a Navy veteran, successfully completes program and becomes a MD
- Compensated Work Therapy: A successful "Partnership" with VR&E.
- Combat Veteran sincerely thanks VA Independent Living Program.
- How you may submit ideas or stories of about your successful employment or rehabilitation.

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## EDITORIAL SECTION

*Author: Terrence D. Lang*

It has been a very pleasurable experience visiting and interviewing veterans across the State of Minnesota in the Title 38 and Chapter 31 programs.

I realize that the veterans we are writing about have successfully completed their programs or are about to finish them; however, while interviewing these veterans, I am able to sense their appreciation and struggles that they have experienced along the way. I have had the good fortune of meeting with many of these veterans personally and listened to them tell their stories. To hear them express their appreciation for the Counselors at the VR&E and the Veterans Representatives, has been most gratifying. In addition, most veterans have expressed their appreciation for the assistance they receive from the Disabled Veteran Program Outreach workers at the

WorkForce Centers. Further more, the knowledge that the DVOP's possess with regard to labor market information, veterans benefits counseling, resume preparation, creative job search planning, and knowledge of the Internet have been an extra plus in helping the Chapter 31 client obtain and secure employment. Kudos and thank you to all counselors and veteran representatives assisting veterans out there on the front lines every day.

### How can you help?

We are still looking for articles from people out in the field. THAT MEANS YOU! Here is your chance to shine and share your success stories. We need to hear more about the good that we do, Lord knows we have a lot about the folks who do fail or fall through the cracks. As Robert (Tree) Roundtree has said, "You do not expect you to be an Ernest Hemingway

or creative writer". That is not our expectation!

We are still encouraging you to contact any of the editors listed below on potential stories of successful job placement, new employers in your labor market, unique case management intervention, community activities, or partnership efforts with other agencies or organizations.

You may fax, telephone, or E-mail one of our editors below. We will contact you regarding the information, confirm receipt, and discuss follow up on an article. You do not need to write the article! That is our job! We just want to hear from you and what you think is an illustration of our partnership, success story, or labor market trend.

**The deadline for ideas or stories for the next issue is July 15, 2001.**



**EDITOR'S NOTES: If you have any articles you would like to have published, please send them to one of the following people below.**

**The deadline for ideas or stories for the next issue is: July 15, 2001**

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## **NSO TRAINEE AND CHAPTER 31 SUCCESS STORY**

*By RJ Roundtree and Terry Lang*

Scott Stamper, U.S. Air Force veteran, is completing the 16-month DAV National Service Officer Training Program, at DAV National Service, St. Paul VA Regional Office. We recently visited him at his office to discuss his program and career goals. Pete Philippi, Scott's supervisor, also participated in the office interview.

Scott originally signed his rehabilitation plan to become a DAV National Service Officer with the Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment Division, Roanoke VA Regional Office. He was working as a mail carrier at the time of the application for vocational rehabilitation. A VA Counselor determined that this was an unsuitable job based on his service-connected low back impairments. Based on assessments and interviews, he was accepted into the DAV Service Officer training and

completed the 16-week training at the DAV Academy in May 2000. He accepted on assignment to the DAV National Service Office, St. Paul VA Regional Office.

Pete has provided regular updates on Scott's progress and performance during the twelve month OJT phase of his training with the local DAV office. He reports, "Scott has met and exceeded all of our expectations during the OJT program. He has earned our respect and that is reflected in statements from numerous veterans on how Scott has assisted them with their claims."

We can validate that statement because we have had the opportunity to work with Scott assisting veterans in developing their claims, developing rehabilitation plans and sharing helpful information on employment or independent living program outcomes. Scott has always been helpful and

available to make sure our veteran customers receive comprehensive assessment and services.



Scott Stamper and Pete Philippi  
Supervisory National Service Officer  
DAV at Fort Snelling

We congratulate Scott and the DAV for demonstrating once again that the On-The-Job Training Program for DAV National Service Officers is a successful working partnership for our veterans with disabilities.

## **VETERAN ACHIEVES MD DEGREE WITH VA ASSISTANCE**

*By RJ Roundtree and Terry Lang*

Kevin Knight is graduating from the University of Minnesota School of Medicine on May 11, 2001! Congratulations to Kevin for reaching his long-term goal of obtaining the M.D. behind his name!



Kevin Knight, Now Doctor Knight, at  
Fairview-University Hospitals

We recently visited Kevin at the Fairview-University Hospital where we had a chance to chat and review his accomplishments. Kevin thanked the VA and staff for all the assistance he had received and how it provided him the opportunity to reach his goal of becoming a physician.

Kevin, a Navy veteran, previously completed his BS degree in Biology and transferred from Idaho based on his acceptance at the University of Minnesota Medical School. He began Medical School in 1996 and has overcome obstacles and demonstrated perseverance to complete the four-year medical degree.

Kevin has been "matched" with the University of California-Irvine, for a four year, paid residency in psychiatry. In addition, he hopes to continue with a "fifth year" to obtain an additional

certification in child and adolescent psychiatry.

Terry and I both got a kick out of addressing Kevin in his new and well deserved job title: Dr. Knight! However, Kevin made sure we understood that the VA Vocational Rehabilitation Program was instrumental in making the new title possible.

Congratulations to Kevin and his family for this significant achievement! This is another illustration of how VA Vocational Rehabilitation can assist veterans with disabilities to obtain long term, professional careers. Terry and I feel that any future patients of Dr. Knight will receive the best health care from a top professional in his chosen career field.



## **GULF WAR VETERAN MOVING TOWARD CAREER GOALS**

*By Robert Roundtree & Terry Lang*

Patrick Sergott, a 100% service-connected disabled, Gulf War veteran, met with us at the VR&E Office, St. Cloud VA Medical Center, on April 4<sup>th</sup>, to discuss his current rehabilitation program success and career goals.

Pat is a former Police Officer from the Chicago area, who was unable to return to meet the full physical job demands of his police officer position after serving with the Marine Corps in Desert Storm. His disabilities were so severe that he moved from the Chicago area in 1993 to be near his family in Minnesota.

During our interview, Pat reported that his original goal was to use his law enforcement and military security experience in obtaining a teaching job in law enforcement or running a security consulting business. He hopes to still use his technical knowledge in security, but eliminate the physical demand requirements typical of a police officer. To that end, he filed for vocational rehabilitation services to assist him to reach a career goal that would use his transferable job

skills, but also require further professional training.

Pat reported he learned about the VA's vocational rehabilitation program from another veteran. He then filed the standard application and was scheduled with Ed Keyser, VA Counseling Psychologist. Pat repeatedly thanked Ed for counseling assistance, guidance and support in developing a realistic rehabilitation plan.



Ed Keyser congratulates Pat Sergott

"I came to this interview to thank Ed Keyser for his going the extra mile to help me reach my goals. His counseling and guidance was the key to success," he said.

Based on our meeting, Pat informs us that he has been teaching law enforcement classes at Central Lakes in Brainerd for the last three years. Most importantly for his long term career goals, Pat is completing internship and practicum classes in Criminal Justice at the same institution. Pat is completing his Master of Science Degree in Criminal Justice from Saint Cloud State University which provides entry level professional training for teaching at the community college or technical school level. He is on target for a potential, permanent career level position at Central Lakes College once he completes the formal degree requirements.

Congratulations to Pat for overcoming his severe disabilities and finding his place in the law enforcement and security business! Medical impairments may prevent full police officer duties, but VA provided education creates opportunities for options for Pat to work in the field he feels most comfortable.

## **FREDDIE WALKER MOVES TOWARD CAREER GOALS!**

*By Robert Roundtree & Terry Lang*

Freddie Walker, former US Engineer Office and ROTC instructor, visited with Ed Keyser, VA Counseling Psychologist, at the St. Cloud VA Medical Center on April 5<sup>th</sup>, to discuss his academic progress and long term career goals. His current position is Associate Director of the Multicultural Student Services at St. Cloud State University, St. Cloud, Minnesota. His current position requires him to supervise the Computer Learning Center, tutorial services, and provide academic counseling for minority and disadvantaged students.

Freddie is currently pursuing a Doctoral Education degree in Educational Leadership, at St. Mary's University. This degree will provide him the opportunity to move into

a permanent, career position in higher education administration. He thanked Ed Keyser for his counseling, guidance, and support that assisted him in identifying a clear career path using his existing skills and with required graduate level training.



Lang Congratulates Freddie on his accomplishments

In response to questions about his rehabilitation needs and how the VR&E program assisted him with career, Freddie would like to thank Ed Keyser, Counseling Psychologist, for his direct intervention and efforts to identify clear, career goals. He repeatedly thanked the VA for the strong support and facilitating the transition to a professional, graduate-training program.

The VR&E Division commends Freddie Walker on his long-term career goal of working with multicultural students in assisting them with achievement of academic goals. It is clear that Freddie's individual rehabilitation success will be multiplied many times over by the students he serves in higher education programs!

## FROM VA WORK STUDY TO REHABILITATION COUNSELOR CAREER

*By Robert Roundtree & Ed Keyser*

Rhett Van Slyke, a U.S. Marine with Corps veteran, has been working Ed Keyser, VA Counseling Psychologist, as a work study graduate student intern at the VR&E Office.

Ed reports that Rhett has demonstrated his value to our Chapter 31 customers by assisting them with case management, test interpretation, counseling on benefits and following up on referrals and employment services. Ed spoke highly of Rhett's personal concern and interests in working with veterans with disabilities.



Rhett Van Slyke receives direction from his supervisor, Ed Keyser, VA Counselor

Rhett, who previously completed a Bachelor's degree in Psychology, is

scheduled to complete a Master of Science Degree in Counseling Psychology with an Emphasis in Rehabilitation, at St. Cloud State University. In addition he has demonstrated his professional growth by membership in the Minnesota Rehabilitation Association and the National Rehabilitation Association. Congratulations to Rhett for his successful graduate degree completion. Thanks for your willingness to assist our veterans in reaching their employment or independent living goals.

## COMPENSATED WORK THERAPY: A "PARTNERSHIP" WITH VR&E

*By Robert Roundtree & Terry Lang*

We recently visited the Compensated Work Therapy Program, Veterans Industries, at the St. Cloud VA Medical Center. Ed Keyser, VR&E Counseling Psychologist, and Thomas Soyka, Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist, St. Cloud VA Medical Center hosted our visit at the CWT facilities.



This Veteran has been helping out for over 10 years and loves it.

Tom reported that currently there are approximately 55 participants in CWT positions, including on-site production contracts and off-site jobs in the community. On-site contracts include manufacture of souvenir products that are shipped to customers throughout the United States. Off-site contracts include job such as: bakery, food service, warehouse, production worker and machine operators.

Compensated Work Therapy (CWT)

provides employment and vocational skills training to increase transition to competitive employment. CWT workers and trainees are referred to the program from the St. Cloud VA Medical Center clinics for initial assessment of vocational rehabilitation needs. Based on initial assessment, the Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist and CWT team develops with the veteran specific employment goals. The job performance and goals are evaluated after the first 90 days, with adjustments made in work site, goals or services for community transition.

In addition to the CWT Program, the St. Cloud VA Medical Center sponsors an Incentive Therapy (IT) Program for job skills assessment and work adjustment. The IT jobs are performed within various departments at the St. Cloud VA Medical Center. IT participants are evaluated for work performance, work behaviors, interests, and recommendations are made on a regular basis for moving to the next level of vocational readiness. Trained, Vocational Rehabilitation Specialists monitor all services.

Tom informed us that the Vocational Programs at St. Cloud VA Medical Center were recently accredited for three years in Employment Development and Employment Planning from the Commission on

Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities. This is a commendable accomplishment for the CWT program and all the VA staff.



Another happy Veteran

Ed Keyser, VA Counseling Psychologist, discussed the referral process to CWT and how the program could assist with feasibility determination and job readiness. Based on the meeting, there is an established "partnership" between VR&E and CWT to provide high quality and timely transitional and job readiness skills to service-connected disabled veterans.

Congratulations to the CWT staff on the CARF accreditation and thanks for allowing us to share your success! We look forward to working with you on developing the IT and CW programs!

## PARTNERSHIP WORKS FOR MINNESOTA VETERANS

*By Robert Roundtree & Ed Keyser*

Restorative Services, St. Cloud VA Medical Center, has teamed up with VA's Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program to provide service-connected disabled veterans with a unique tool to use in their vocational and career planning. It is called Functional Capacities Evaluation or FCE.

VR&E Counselors can make a referral to the Functional Capacities Evaluation Clinic at St. Cloud VA Medical where trained Occupational Therapists conduct the systematic evaluation over a 2-day period. Diane Losinski and Judith Huls, Occupational Therapists, reviewed the state-of-art Valpar Joule Functional Capacity Program and equipment at our visit to their clinic on April 4, 2001.



Diane Losinski, Occupational Therapist, evaluates a veteran

As pictures attached to this article illustrate, the Occupational Therapist was observed conducting the evaluation with veterans at the FCE clinic. Diane discussed and

demonstrated the efficient use of the FCE and how it may help a veteran and Counselor in identifying occupations that can be performed within the defined medical or disability impairments.

For example, if a veteran is interested in computer business occupations but has a low back strain or impairment, the FCE can assist in identifying the veteran's ability to sustain the prolonged sitting demanded of this occupation or identify accommodations to meet the specific job demands.

One of the advantages of the FCE is that it can be tailored to evaluate a specific job description or occupation. During the referral process, the Counselor may forward a copy of the written job description of the career being explored or utilize the Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT) description reference. In either case, the FCE can provide accurate and reliable information on the veteran's ability to meet the job demands or potential barriers to job performance. The outcome is a more realistic assessment of career options where physical performance is questionable or unclear based on only clinical interview information.

VR & E Counselors have the opportunity to make referrals to the

FCE Clinic and overnight housing can be provided, if needed, by the St. Cloud VA Medical Center. Questions on referrals can be made directly to Diane Losinski at 320-255-6370.

Joe Thompson, Under Secretary for Benefits, to the St. Cloud VAMC and the St. Paul Regional Office's VR&E staff were presented a VA Scissors Award in 1998 for the FCE partnership. The results of this initiative were a "Win-Win" situation for all partners, but primarily for Chapter 31 rehabilitation participants.



Diane Losinski, OT, prints out report of evaluation conducted on veteran.

Our visit to the FCE clinic verified the benefits of this tool in providing good career and occupational guidance to veterans with disabilities. Thanks again to the St. Cloud VA Medical Center for their efforts and cooperation in assisting vocational rehabilitation participants in reaching their employment or independent living goals.

### Interesting facts about Minnesota

Minneapolis combines the Dakota word for water ("minne") with the Greek word for city ("polis") a fitting name for a city with 18 of Minnesota's 12,034 lakes. Minneapolis is renowned for combining the best of urban life with the neighbors and quality of life found in smaller towns. Residents enjoy exciting cultural and recreational opportunities in beautiful natural surroundings.

Minneapolis is the largest city in Minnesota and the center of finance, industry, trade, and transportation for the Upper Midwest.

With an average annual temperature of 45 F (7 C), Minneapolis is the second coldest city in the United States. During an average winter, the temperatures reach 20 to 30 below zero Fahrenheit (-29 to -34 C). Minneapolis has four distinct seasons with moderate spring and fall weather. Summer is comfortable because lakes and trees serve as natural air conditioners.



## INDEPENDENT LIVING GOALS ACHIEVED WITH AIR FORCE VETERAN

By RJ Roundtree and Ed Keyser

David Plantenberg, a US Air Force veteran, with a serious employment handicap, met with VR&E staff, including, Ed Keyser, VA Counseling Psychologist, at the VR&E Office, St. Cloud VAMC on April 4<sup>th</sup>. The purpose of the meeting was to interview David about his recent experience with the VA's Independent Living program.

David, originally was a graphic artist and worked a number of years in commercial printing jobs. However, because of the severity of his service-connected disability, he was not able to continue his customary employment. He reports that approximately 4 years ago, he filed for VA Vocational Rehabilitation with the original intention of going into a self-employment plan. David expressed that, "I thought self-employment would allow me to work within my severe medical restrictions and still allow me to earn a living."

Ed Keyser, VA Counseling Psychologist, met with David and,

based on the initial evaluations, determined that the severity of the impairments ruled out a primary goal of self-employment and recommended an independent living plan. David agreed and the plan included a review of computer technology and equipment that could allow him to continue a reduced level of graphic design activity for his personal self-esteem, interests, and community activity. David stated that the independent living program allowed him to "feel proud and productive again. I can still share my skills and interests with my children."

David now reports that his independent living goals are achieved by allowing him to sustain a level of interest and performance in graphics design with the physical limitations imposed by his disability. He reports that without VA's independent living program his options were few and he would be isolated within his own community.



**Ed congratulates David**

During the interview, David thanked Ed Keyser for his concern, kindness, and making the independent living program a success. David strongly recommended, "if a veteran is interested in self-improvement and sustaining goals, the VA can help!"

The VR&E staff congratulates David for his personal development and achieving his independent living goals! You demonstrate to all of us that success is not measured by employment alone!

## VA CREATES INDEPENDENT LIVING TASK TEAM

By RJ Roundtree

Headquarters, VR&E service recently appointed me as a member of the Independent Living Task Team. We completed our first week of meetings in Washington, DC February 26-March 2, 2001.

The Independent Living Task Team has been requested to address the following issues: Determining gaps in where we are today and where we want to be in the future, developing action items and changes that will

achieve ideal state of practices, developing a measurement tool to determine success, and implementing a community of practice.

The Independent Living Task Team will be assisting with developing regional training, satellite training, marketing efforts, training guide, and web site. These steps will be completed and deployed over the next two years.

I look forward to working all the

Independent Living Task Team members on moving toward our goals. However, I want to stress to all of the St. Paul VA Regional Office staff, I also invite your ideas, suggestions, and examples of good independent living practice. This is really a Team Effort!

In the next issue of this newsletter, I will update you on our progress and team efforts. That should be by the end of August 2001 (projected Summer Issue).

***"It's easy to get good players. Getting 'em to play together, that's the hard part."***

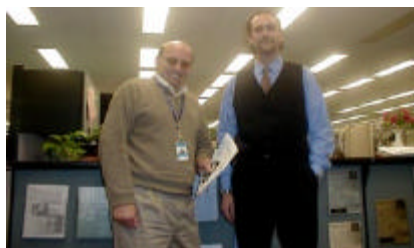
**By Casey Stengel**

## VA COUNSELORS & DVOP'S USE LABOR MARKET INFORMATION

By RJ ROUNDTREE

VA Counselors have been using labor market information (LMI) provided by the Minnesota Department of Economic Security (MDES) to assist Ch31 participants with making good career decisions. There is an enormous amount of economic and labor market trend information available on the Internet and at local Minnesota WorkForce Center offices. The primary issue is if either VA staff or Chapter 31 participants can readily access or understand the significance of the labor data for their personal career choices.

Terry Lang, DVOP, and I recently visited the offices of Ed Valencia, Workforce Dissemination Manager, Research and Planning Branch, Minnesota Department of Economic Security, 390 N. Robert Street, St. Paul, Minnesota.



Lang receives Labor Market information and materials from Ed Valencia.

Ed was very receptive to our requests for additional updated training and current employment data that could improve the quality and timeliness of our career counseling and rehabilitation planning services. Ed indicated that our staff can obtain the regularly scheduled 4 hour block of training in LMI at local WorkForce Center offices or our offices could develop a customized training component for VA Counselors and

Counseling Psychologists.

Ed made suggestions for contacting selected organizations in the community to assist with our future job placement efforts in the information technology industry. In addition, he provided guidance on which MDES publications could easily be obtained and accessed for Ch31 participants.

In addition to the suggestions on training and publications, Ed has stated that we could use the public information on the labor market trends or LMI alerts available on the Internet for the **Minnesota Spirit** Newsletter.

We want to thank Ed and his staff for their contributions that assist our VA staff and veterans in making better decisions on careers and employment goals. Thanks Ed!

We look forward to working with you in the future!

## VR&E STAFF CONTINUES IMPROVING SKILLS

By RJ Roundtree

The St. Paul VR&E Division continues to find new ways to improve their rehabilitation skills by participating in a 2 day training



Barb Quade welcomes other VISN staff

seminar with other VA and non-VA community resources. The training was held March 20-22, 2001, at the St.

Paul VA Regional Office.

The topics of discussion and training were VA Balanced Scorecard, quality assurance, independent living, employment services, psychometric testing, and VA marketing efforts. Staff from VISN 13 and the Minneapolis VA Medical Center provided information on potential areas of joint marketing and how to quickly respond to Ch31 health care requests.

Dave Hancox, Executive Director, Metropolitan Center for Independent Living Center, St. Paul, and Al Noll, Director, Assistive Technology Center, Stout Vocational Rehabilitation Institute, both provided information on how their programs could assist with VA independent living service

evaluation and service delivery.

The outcome of the meeting was the establishment of specific next steps in developing better services and linkages with community resources for employment services and independent living programs.



VR&E Counselors hard at work at the conference table.

***“A good plan executed right now is far better than a perfect plan executed next week.”***

***By George S. Patton***



## **COMBAT VETERAN BENEFITS FROM VA INDEPENDENT LIVING**

By RJ Roundtree and Terry Lang

It has been a long time since Jay Smith was wounded in combat action in the Republic of South Vietnam. 32 years later, he shared his experiences and thoughts about his successful experience about the VA's Independent Living Program.

Jay, sitting with his wife, Karen, in their Pine Island, Minnesota, home, told us, "More positive things have happened to us in the last 9 months with the Independent Living Program than all the prior years!" He described that his first step in his success was meeting Jerry Bacon, VA Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, at the Minnesota WorkForce Center Office, in Rochester.

Pointing out with humor his positive experiences with a VA Counselor, Jay described that when meeting much younger Jerry Bacon, he asked himself the question, "Can this young guy really understand what I need and how to help me?" Jay reports, the positive answer to that question has been demonstrated over and over again with VA support and much needed services.

Jerry Bacon developed a comprehensive plan to assess and implement specific, measurable independent living goals. To reach the goals, Jerry drew upon the community resource expertise of Renee Kreter, Rehabilitation Consultant, Stubbe Associates. Working together, they coordinated medical services, technical consultations, computer training, and structural alterations, including a ramp.

Renee reports that, "Jay has come a long way from a feeling of helplessness to a new quality of life as demonstrated by new opportunities to participate in community activities, including, recreational, educational, and family events." Karen and Jay reinforced over and over again their appreciation for Renee's quick action and response to their requests and assisting with meeting the independent living goals.

Jay's independent living program required comprehensive services, which included: assessment, medical case management, computer equipment, computer training, recreational resources, structural

alterations (ramp), prosthetics, and outpatient treatment from the Minneapolis VA Medical Center.



Renee Kreter, Jerry Bacon, and Jay in his Pine Island Home

As we concluded our visit, Jay informed us that, "Independent Living has had a dramatic impact on my life. My only recommendations are that the VA gets the word out and tell more veterans about this unique program. I intend to use my story as an illustration of what can be accomplished if they will only apply and seek VA assistance."

Congratulations Jay and Karen! Your success story is what our veterans deserve and should expect with the VA's Independent Living Program.

## **ST. PAUL LIBRARY SYSTEM BENEFITS FROM VR&E TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT SERVICES**

By RJ Roundtree and Terry Lang

Bill Newsom, a US Navy retiree, previously completed a training program in Microsoft Certified Systems Engineering at Dakota Vocational Technical College. However, because of a change in industry standards, his certification was due to end by the end of this calendar year. That fact potentially placed his job as an Information Technology Support Specialist with the St. Paul Library System in jeopardy.

Bill contacted his VR&E Division Counselor who verified the change in technology and impact on his ability to retain his job. Based on contact with the employer and verification of the need for the short-term training upgrade and certification for Windows 2000, a rehabilitation plan was developed with

the goal of job retention with the St. Paul Library system.



Bill is always looking to upgrade his computer skills to meet the Industry standards and demands.

Bill continues with the St. Paul Library system in a job, which he enjoys and that provides a professional, entry level income and excellent employee benefits. The St. Paul Library system

continues to retain a highly productive, creative, and potentially long-term career employee.

We recently visited Bill at one of the local library branches where he provides information technology support. He thanked the VA for the training and employment assistance that allows him to retain a quality, career job. In turn, we thanked Bill for his excellent job performance and willingness to invest in career retention with a great community employer.

Bill's story is a good illustration of how VA Vocational Rehabilitation can assist a veteran with a disability and his employer in a mutually satisfying outcome: professional wages and a productive, contribution to an important community agency.

## NEW PARTNERSHIP HELPS VETERANS REACH GOALS

By RJ Roundtree

The Office of Students with Disabilities (OSD) of the Minneapolis Community and Technical College has established a new partnership with VA's Vocational Rehabilitation



Kim Korte and Jane Larson

recently visited the OSD's new office to meet their staff and discuss our mutual goals.

Jane Larson, Director, and Kim Korte, Advisor, provided a tour of their new office facilities at the MCTC campus in Minneapolis. They discussed with us the comprehensive OSD intervention services that are available to assist our vocational rehabilitation participants reach their academic and employment goals. The services include: advising, resource identification, case management intervention, disability resource identification, and career resource referrals.

The OSD staff have agreed to meet with vocational rehabilitation participants, review their individual rehabilitation plans, obtain grade

reports, and advise both the VA and veteran on realistic progress or barriers to reach the established employment/career goals. If the OSD staff have identified barriers to successful goal attainment, they will submit recommendations to the VA Counselor on steps to overcome the barriers, resources to facilitate the goals, or identify suitable, employment alternatives.

The VR&E staff congratulate the OSD for their professional work and their willingness to "take the extra step" in providing quality career opportunities for our veterans with disabilities. We look forward to a long, productive "partnership" in the Twin Cities area.

Program. Terry Lang, Minnesota WorkForce Center DVOP, and I

## THE NATIONAL COALITION FOR HOMELESS VETERANS AND THE MINNESOTA ASSISTANCE COUNSELING VETERANS

By London Lowman

It was back in 1990 when a handful of similar leaders from community-based non-profit organizations formed the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (NCHV). Three years later NCHV opened its Washington DC



**Westside, a Homeless Veteran**

office to serve as a liaison and resource center for homeless veteran service providers, other community-based groups, homeless veterans, Congress and Executive Branch agencies. Today, as in the past, NCHV remains steadfast to its original goal on informative representation, and the ongoing elimination of

homelessness within the veteran community.

This coalition is built from community-based providers and other support organizations in 45 states and the District of Columbia that provide the day-to-day, front-line services to our nation's homeless veterans. Such as the Minnesota Assistance Counseling Veterans (MACV), their services fall within the full continuum of care systems including drop in centers, emergency shelters, transitional supportive housing and permanent housing, living skill and job placement assistance through veteran placement representatives.

Their mission: The National Coalition for Homeless Veterans will end homelessness among veterans by shaping public policy, educating the public and building the capacity of service providers.

The 2001 Meeting and Conference was held in Washington DC March 7-9, Capital Hill visits were made by members from Minnesota and those

representing other states, to elicit congressional support in passage of a comprehensive bill that will end veterans homelessness. This specific legislation is in a bill known as the



**Heather French and Jimmy Lee**

Heather French for Homeless Veterans, she was Miss America and devoted her concerns and passion to helping those veterans who were homeless. It was passed in the House of Representatives and we were able to get Senator Wellstone to introduce it in the senate. Total support from all is and has been necessary.

***"You cannot help men permanently by doing for them what they could and should do for themselves."***

**By Abraham Lincoln**

# **ST PAUL VA REGIONAL OFFICE** **EXTENDS TOLL-FREE TELEPHONE** **CUSTOMER SERVICE HOURS**

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will extend telephone service on a trial basis for Minnesota callers. This telephone coverage, effective November 1, 2000, extends customer service from **4:30 P.M.** to **8:00 p.m.** daily, Monday through Friday.

Ronald J. Henke, Director at the St. Paul VA Regional Office, announced this pilot program saying that “we are always looking for ways to increase service to America’s veterans.”

Veterans benefits counselors provide information on compensation, pension, education and loan guaranty benefits and services. VA’s nation-wide toll-free telephone number is **1-800-827-1000**.